2026-08-26 15:59:34 You

What were the specific false doctrines, prevailing in his day, that John was targeting in his epistles?

DeepSeek

John's epistles were written against an early form of **proto-Gnosticism**, especially as it affected the churches around Ephesus in the late first century. The specific false doctrines he targeted included:

1. **Denial that Jesus Christ had truly come in the flesh (Docetism)**
   Some false teachers taught that the divine Christ could not really have become a physical human being, since they viewed matter as evil. Therefore, Jesus only *seemed* to be human. John directly counters this:
   - "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:2–3).
   - "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh" (2 John 7).
2. **Separation between the man Jesus and the divine Christ (Cerinthianism)**
   Early church tradition says Cerinthus taught that Jesus was an ordinary man, and that the divine "Christ" descended on him at his baptism but departed before his crucifixion. Thus the divine Christ did not truly suffer or die. John opposes this by insisting:
   - "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (1 John 2:22).
   - "This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not with the water only but with the water and the blood" (1 John 5:6).
     The "water and blood" likely refer to Jesus' baptism and death, affirming that the same Jesus Christ was both baptized and crucified.
3. **Denial of sin and the need for ongoing cleansing**
   Some claimed they had reached a state of spiritual enlightenment where they were without sin, or that sin in the body did not matter spiritually. John corrects this:
   - "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).
   - "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar" (1 John 1:10).
     He also stresses Jesus' atoning death: "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2; 4:10).
4. **Antinomianism and lack of love**
   The false teachers claimed to know God and walk in light, yet they did not keep God's commandments or love fellow believers. John says such claims are empty:

- “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar” (1 John 2:4).
- “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20).

5. **Rejection of apostolic authority and orthodox confession**
   John describes these teachers as former church members who broke away and denied the Son:
   - “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19).
   - “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3).
     He warns believers not to receive such teachers (2 John 10–11).

In summary, John was targeting **Christological heresies—especially Docetism and Cerinthianism—and the moral errors that flowed from them: denial of real incarnation, denial of Jesus as the Christ, denial of sin’s seriousness, antinomianism, and lovelessness**.